

Opening Remarks by Ron Pugliese

Committee on Legislative and Executive Nominations

Thursday, April 16, 2009

Good afternoon, Senator Looney, Representative Janowski, and members of the Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you to discuss my service as a member of the Board of Trustees for the Connecticut State University System.

First, let me say that I am grateful to Governor Rell for placing my name before you for re-nomination. It has been a privilege to serve and have a role in the many advances achieved by CSUS, to the benefit of the students and our state.

I am very enthusiastic about continuing this service, because if I have learned anything these past few years, it is just how important higher education is to Connecticut's future, and particularly how important the CSUS universities are to Connecticut.

I am a product of Waterbury's public schools and Connecticut's public universities, and I received a terrific education. I attended Mattatuck Community College, and Central briefly, and finished at Western Connecticut State University - where I graduated with a degree in secondary education and history. So, I am a believer in public higher education.

In my career in business and public service, I have served as a member of the Town Council in Naugatuck, as president of the Connecticut Retail Merchants Association, as president of the Waterbury Association of Retarded Citizens, and chairman of the board of the New England Financial Services Association.

But nothing means more to me than my association with the Connecticut State University System. I have been proud to serve as a member of the Board of Trustees since 1997, and in that time I have been fortunate to serve as a member of the Executive Committee, to chair the Development Committee, to previously Chair the Student Life Committee, to serve on several Presidential searches and to serve on the ad hoc Committee on Presidential Assessment.

The Board is made up of a very dedicated group of individuals, with a common commitment to public higher education, and to CSUS. The progress of the universities has just been phenomenal, and I have experienced that first-hand, not only as a board member, but also as a father of two sons who have their graduate degrees from Southern, with one of my sons also having his undergraduate degree from Central. My wife Janice also has her Graduate degree from Southern.

As you know, 93 percent of our students are from Connecticut, and 86 percent stay in the state after graduation. That is especially important, as Connecticut's looks to the future. We have seen interest grow as potential students like what they see -- as they think not only about their education, but their prospects for jobs after graduation.

Two other interesting trends are, I believe, good news for Connecticut.

First, 6 of the 12 Connecticut community colleges set a record this year in the number of students who transferred to a CSUS university to continue their education. The pathway from college to university has never been stronger, smoother or better, and I am proud to say that this has been an area of concentration for the Board, for our Chancellor, and each of the universities.

Overall, transfers from Connecticut Community Colleges are up 46% since 2001, and reached an all-time high in 2008. That work is continuing, and there is more good news on the horizon next week. As an individual who took that route, from

community college to Western, I am especially pleased about this, which I think is great for our state.

Second, we have seen the number of students transferring to our four universities from out-of-state colleges and universities climb – and 76% of those students are Connecticut residents, in effect coming home to continue their education. At a time when so much attention is paid to young people leaving our state, it is noteworthy that the CSUS universities are helping to attract some young people back.

In the midst of this good news, we are obviously dealing with economic uncertainty, as are all of you here in the legislature. We have had to make some difficult decisions, regarding salary freezes, staff cutbacks and reducing expenditures. The Board has worked very closely with Chancellor Carter and our Presidents to take fiscally prudent actions, even as we protect the integrity of the education we provide.

We are seeing unprecedented interest in our universities, with enrollment up, applications up, and the quality of the education up as well. We've come a long way since my days at Central and Western, and Connecticut has a lot to be proud of. Certainly, the support of the legislature over the years has been a big part of that accomplishment.

As I indicated earlier, I am very proud to serve our State as a Trustee of the Connecticut State University System, and very proud of my long-standing relationship with the System. I ask for your support to continue the work of making this System even better in the years to come.

Thank you for listening, and I will try to answer any questions you may have.